

# Equity and Sustainability for Jacumba Hot Springs

A review of the Jacumba Valley Ranch Solar Energy Park and its impacts on the future viability of Jacumba

Planning Commission Hearing  
9 July 2021



# Jacumba Hot Springs (JHS) Overview

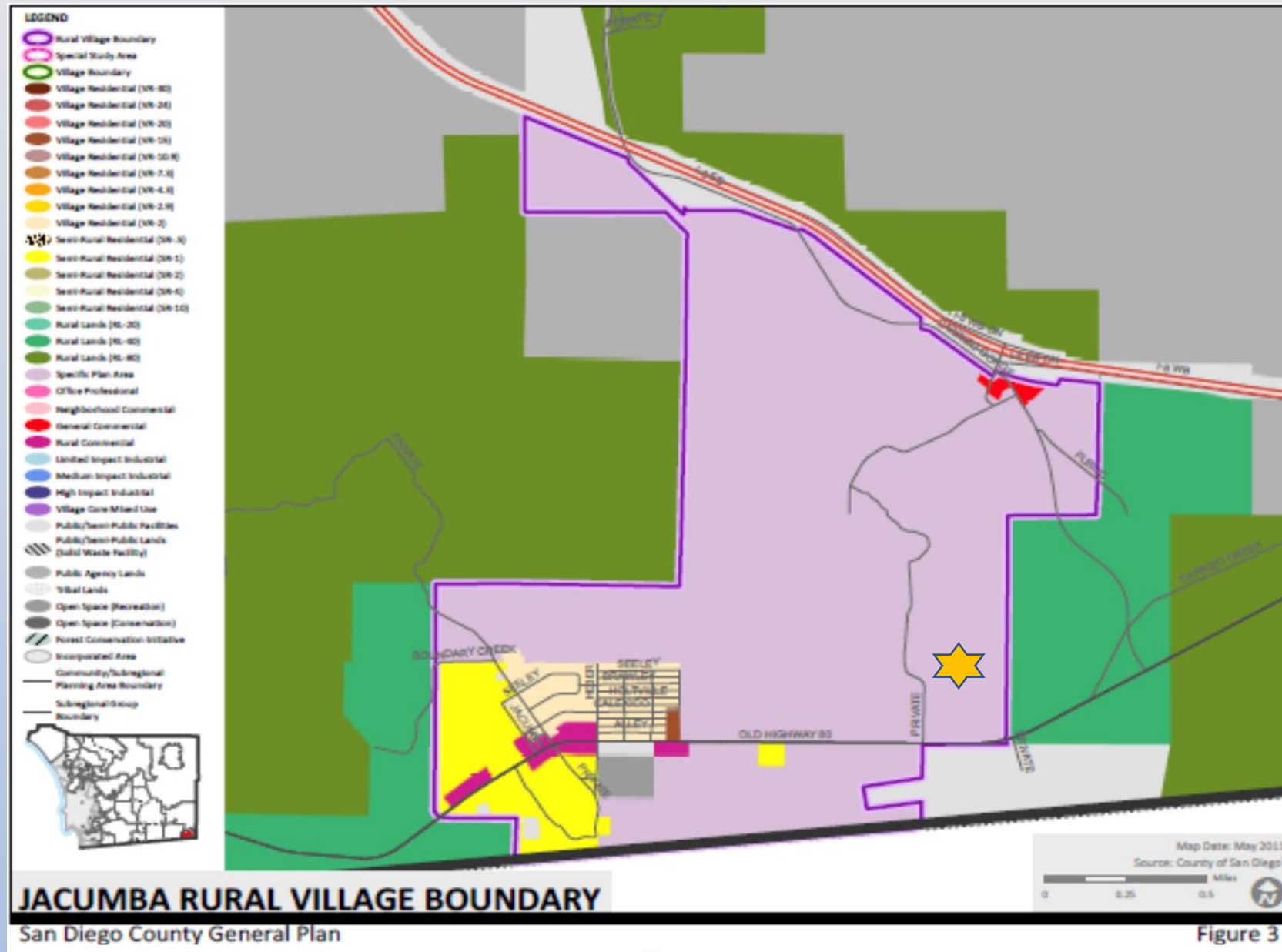
- 70 miles east of San Diego
- Located on Scenic Hwy 80, just south of I-8, just before descent to Ocotillo/desert
- Historic resort community with a heyday lasting from mid-1920s to mid-1960s
- Spa/restaurant/pools, man-made pond, Jacumba airport, and historic dairy, unique rock houses, an elementary school closed since 2017, ruins of a 1924 bathhouse, and a 1922 railroad station.
- 561 residents; about 250 modest homes.
- Average annual income is \$32K or 150% below the State average of \$82K.
- Racial makeup: ~50% white; ~40 % Hispanic; 10% other races.
- New resort owners are in the process of renovating the town.



11<sup>th</sup> Cavalry passing through JHS in 1941

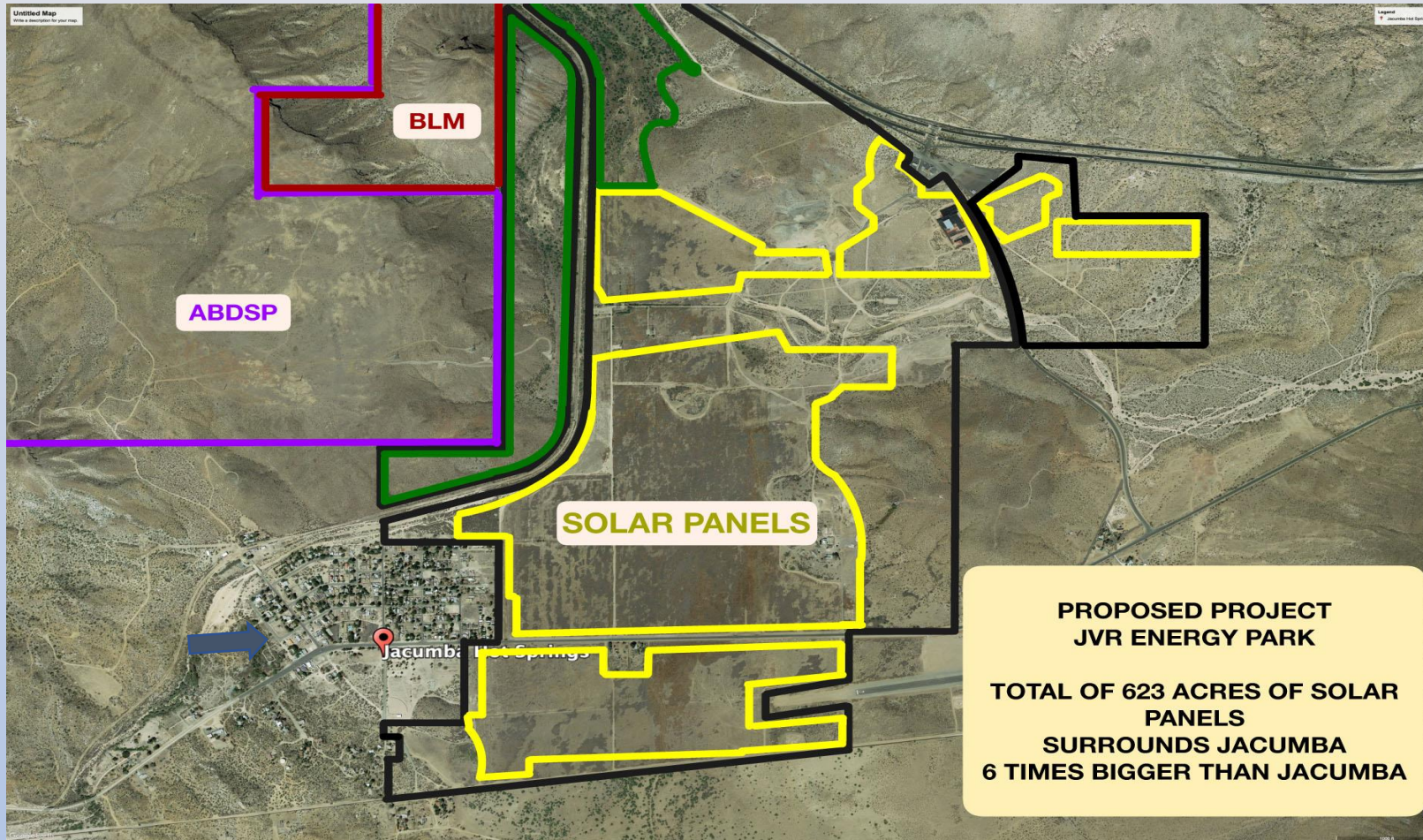


A rainbow  
over the ruins  
of the former  
bathhouse.



## JHS Layout

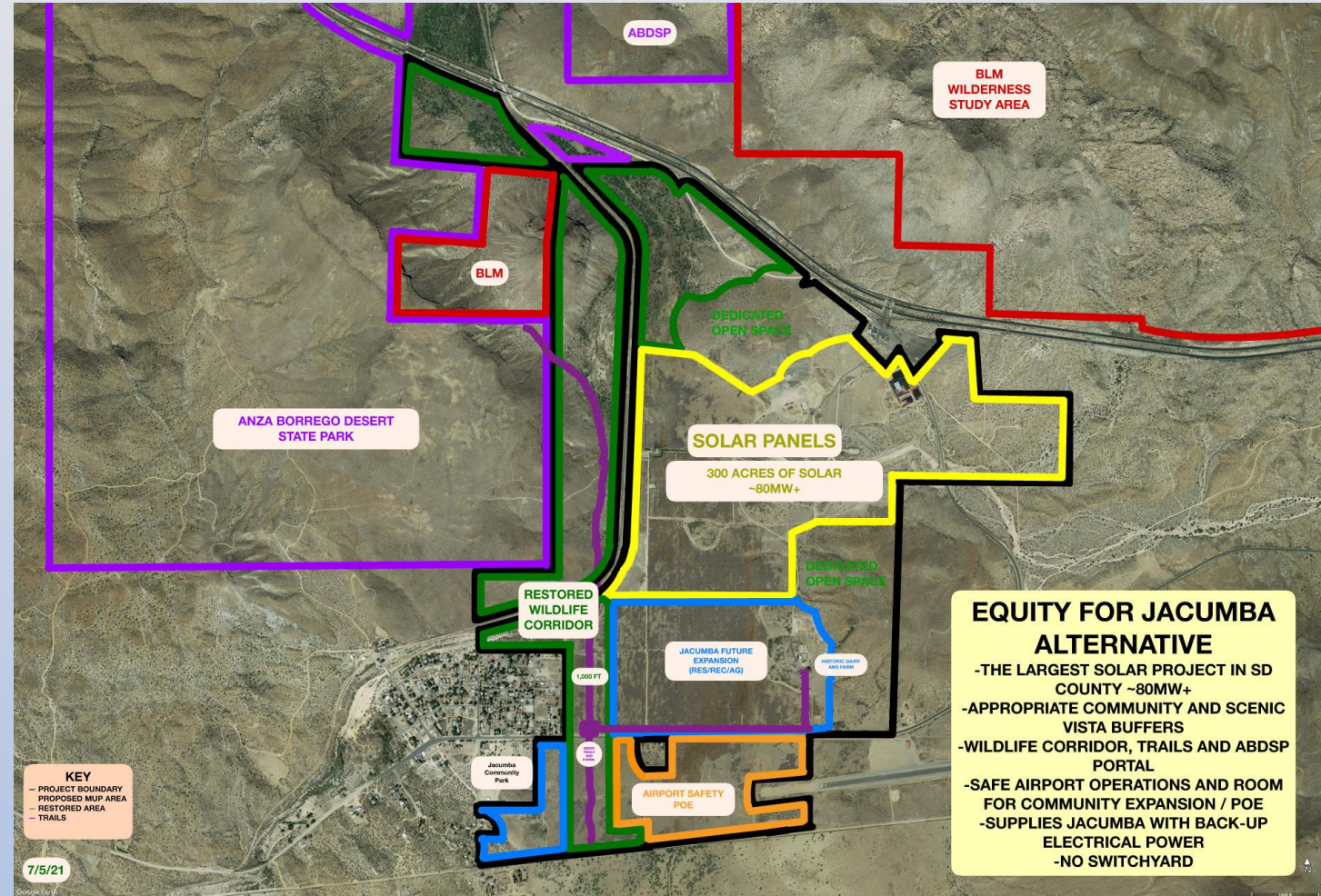
# Revised 623-acre JVR Plan as Described in the EIR



- Consumes the best vacant land within the Jacumba rural village boundary.
- Wraps around 3 sides of the airport runway.
- Adjacent to BLM and ABDSP lands.
- Would be the largest permitted solar facility in SD County at 90 MW of power

# Equity for Jacumba Alternative Plan

- ~300 acres for solar facility with newer technology ~ 80 MW
- No switchyard.
- 1,000 foot-wide N/S restored wildlife corridor from the border wall to ABDSP and BLM lands with trails.
- Trail on N. side of scenic Hwy 80 leading to a preserved historic dairy site.
- Eliminates solar components south of scenic Hwy 80; reserves land for community/airport expansion and possible POE.
- Reserves portion of central Jacumba Valley for residential/agricultural uses.
- Provides an alternative power supply during Red Flag Warnings



## JCSG concerns:

Although described as an interim project, the JVR Energy Par, with a decommissioning plan for 2058, will certainly out-last a majority of Jacumba residents. The only reason it can be placed within a rural village is its designation as a specific plan area in the 1980s. This S88 zoning designation was needed for a large residential project. When that project was withdrawn, the designation remained. (MUP Extension)

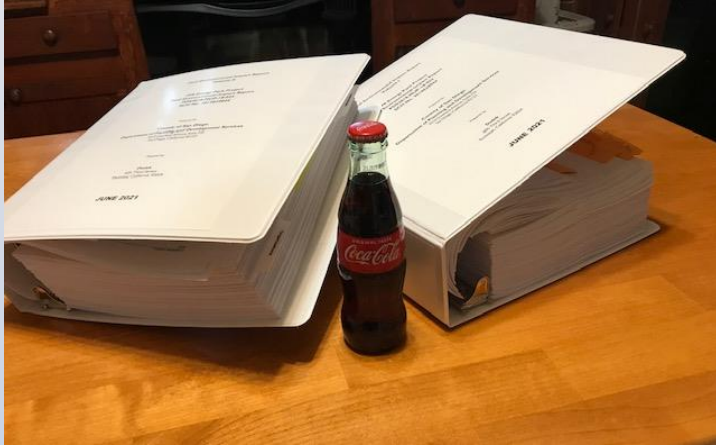
Jacumba residents know that once this solar project is constructed, the land will never return to a more appropriate use, one that could provide some economic benefits/local jobs, and enhance the viability of the town. They are NOT willing to let some of the best agricultural land in East County be entirely covered with solar arrays. (Lara)

They understand that if such a large solar facility is built, their town will never grow, and that property values which are already some of the lowest in the County, will decline.



Above is a 2020 photo of the former mountain Meadows Dairy. Left is a photo of the farm in 1940

# Process and Perceptions



## CEQA Review Process:

- too slow for the developer
- too quick for the sponsor group
- COVID restrictions
- Enormous project documents overwhelming to review: DEIR/FEIR/PC Hearing report
- JSCG members unfamiliar the complexity of a MUP

## Community Perceptions about JVR solar:

- The fix is in with a PPA already in place.
- The developer did not make a good faith effort to engage the JCSG to see what the community would accept. (May 18, June 29)
- Since the need for renewable energy is so great, the permitting of large solar facilities in the backcountry is likely to continue.
- Not an interim land use; destroys community character and scenic views in perpetuity.
- It will ultimately ruin a town that is finally on the way to making a comeback with new resort owners.
- It would never be built next to a wealthier community.
- It displaces wildlife and seeks to demolish historic farm buildings that have a 90-year connection to the town.
- The FEIR response to community concerns/comments was disappointingly dismissive.

## Summary

- JHS previously supported the 20 MW 108-acre Jacumba Solar facility and the 58-acre ECO substation operating ~2 miles east of town.
- The Community Buffer Alternative endorsed by PDS would permit a 604-acre solar utility with ~281,000 solar modules that stretches from the border wall to the I-8 corridor, along on both sides of scenic Hwy 80, on 3 sides of the Jacumba airport runway, adjacent to residences. This effectively destroys the town's chances to grow/thrive.
- The Equity for Jacumba Alternative would allow BayWa the ability to generate nearly equivalent power while still giving JHS a decent chance at a better future.



## JCSG Recommendations to the Planning Commissioners:

- Be brave and do the right thing...Deny the Community Buffer Alternative and the Statement of Overriding Considerations
- Send a clear message to BayWa that it can not steamroll residents into accepting a solar farm of this magnitude and that it must be willing to strike a compromise.

**After all, the town of Jacumba was here first...**